

DEPARTMENT OF ALCOHOL AND DRUG PROGRAMS

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Statewide Town Hall Meetings Target Underage Drinking

Sacramento, CA – Underage drinking and youth will take center stage at more than a hundred Town Hall Meetings throughout California during the week of March 22–26 to raise awareness and generate discussion about this increasingly serious public health problem.

Timed to coincide with the start of *Alcohol Awareness Month* in April, the meetings will bring together youth, parents, teachers, politicians, law enforcement, business owners, faith-based and community leaders, and substance use treatment providers in communities in forty of the state's fifty-eight counties.

Alcohol is the most widely used substance of abuse among America's youth. Among children and adolescents, alcohol use starts early and increases rapidly with age. In 2008, nearly 16 percent of 8th graders, almost 29 percent of 10th graders, and more than 43 percent of 12th graders reported drinking an alcoholic beverage in the previous month, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) survey entitled *Monitoring the Future: National Results on Adolescent Drug Use—Overview of Key Findings, 2008*. (<http://www.drugabuse.gov/PDF/overview2008.pdf>)

A higher percentage of youth in 8th, 10th, and 12th grades used alcohol in the month prior to being surveyed than used tobacco or marijuana, the illicit drug most commonly used by adolescents.

The NIDA survey also reports that *heavy* drinking is a problem at all three grade levels. Among eighth graders, about 1 in 20 (5.4 percent) reported being drunk at least once in the past month. Nearly 1 out of every 7 10th graders (14.4 percent) and about 2 out of every 7 12th graders (27.6 percent) reported being drunk at least once in the last month.

"Too many young Californians are dying from binge drinking, too many are severely injured in accidents, and too many suffer long-term medical and social consequences as a result of alcohol," said Director Renée Zito from the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs. "Town Hall Meetings throughout the state will help us increase community understanding of underage drinking and its consequences. Our youth are asking for direction and these meetings offer an excellent forum in which to find answers for this serious problem."

The Town Hall Meetings are sponsored and funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) of the US Department of Health and Human Services with promotional support from ADP, the Governors Prevention Advisory Council (GPAC), the Friday Night Live Partnership and county alcohol and drug agencies.

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“We hope these meetings will be a catalyst for action in communities across California to affect change and aid in prevention of underage drinking,” said Jaime Taylor from of the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control and chairperson of GPAC’s Underage Drinking Prevention Workgroup.

This year’s Town Hall Meetings have increased significantly in number from those held in 2008. Most notably, more young people are taking charge to plan and execute meetings in their communities. Youth involvement in the planning and implementation of meetings on underage drinking is the cornerstone of Friday Night Live’s participation.

“Instead of talking about youth—or talking at them—it is time to listen to them regarding their ideas on how to reduce underage drinking,” said Dr. Jim Cooler, Administrator for California Friday Night Live, a statewide partnership aimed at preventing drinking and driving and promoting healthy lifestyles among youth and teens.

For more information and to find the location of a Town Hall Meeting in a community in California, visit <http://www.stopalcoholabuse.gov/TownHallMeetings/map/eventlist.aspx?id=6>

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Note to Editors:

Attached to this release—in alphabetical order by city—is a complete list of all **104** locations for Town Hall Meetings in California. Date, time and contact information is listed for each location.